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SUBJECT: BULGARIA HAILS SUCCESSFUL IRAQI VOTE, PLEDGES COOPERATION WITH NEW GOVERNMENT

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1. Bulgaria's government congratulated the Iraqi people on the successful conduct of the December 15 parliamentary elections and said it was ready to continue its cooperation with the new Iraqi leadership. In a special public statement issued December 16, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Dimitar Tsanchev said Bulgaria welcomed the successful Iraqi vote that marked the onset of a new period of economic recovery, consolidation of state institutions, security and legal order in Iraq. "The high voter turnout is evidence of the Iraqi citizens' will to take the fate of their country in their own hands and of their desire to ensure a better future for themselves and the succeeding generations," Tsanchev said. "We expect the future Iraqi government, which will be elected for a full four-year term, to work for the establishment of Iraq as a free, democratic and prospering state, in accordance with the principles set down in the new Constitution," said the spokesman. He said, "Bulgaria will continue to contribute, within the international coalition and NATO, to the stabilization of Iraq."

2. In addition, the Bulgarian state television BNT prime time newscast aired a report December 16 about 200 Iraqis living in Bulgaria traveling to Istanbul to vote. The Embassy worked closely with the Iraqi Embassy in Sofia and local media to ensure coverage of this story. The report focused on the enthusiasm and euphoria of the Iraqi citizens who were given the chance to take part in free and democratic elections for the first long-term legislative body since the ousting of Saddam's regime. BNT also aired expanded coverage of the Iraqi expatriate's absentee vote December 17. The Iraqi Ambassador to Bulgaria and Iraqi embassy staff traveled with the group to Istanbul. Local press also reported on the Iraqi elections noting that, despite the threats and several bomb explosions, voter turnout was high. Newspapers quoted a Defense Ministry statement that said voting in the area of Diwanya, which is the Bulgarian troops' area of responsibility, went smoothly and without incident, with voter turnout around 60 percent.

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